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MINERS AND IRON WORKERS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

IT is a subject of very general and practical interest, to the legislator and student as well as to the laboring voter, to know how the condition and earnings of laborers in the United States compare with those of our chief industrial competitors. Nor have there been lacking in recent years many attempts to answer this somewhat complex question, both by our government and by private investigators. The last word of the government comes to us in the form of a semi-official pamphlet by Dr. Gould, the head of the foreign commission of the Department of Labor, which is considered of sufficient importance to justify its publication in France and Germany as well as in the *Contemporary Review* and in the Johns Hopkins University *Studies*, where it forms the first issue of the eleventh series.

Dr. Gould's work should command attention, both for the breadth of his investigation and for its catholic spirit. He seldom points a moral whether for protection or free trade, while affording the student the most ample opportunity to draw one for himself from the statistics he has laboriously analyzed with the command of them which he gained in their gathering.

There has been so much wild assertion in this field that it is refreshing to find facts apparently trustworthy so clearly presented. It is my purpose here to pass them in brief review, to note some points where the figures suggest their own inaccuracy and some others where it seems to me Dr. Gould has not altogether seen their true significance, and to show, more than it was his purpose to do, their bearing on the problems that confront us.

We have to contrast the condition and wages of laborers in this country and in the chief productive countries of Europe, especially England, Belgium and Germany. We have

to bear in mind that the differences we discover may be due to unavoidable causes, such as situation or climate, or to race, or to legislation. It is not enough to fix the rate of money wages nor their comparative purchasing power, for the hours of labor and its intensity may differ, and again the amenities of life or ties of race may make a man content with a lower wage in one place than he would accept in another, and may make the workman prefer comfort at home to higher wages abroad. There are parts of Germany, for instance, where like labor is paid three times what it receives in others.

The statistics gathered by the commissioners, of whom Mr. Gould was chief, were got with much difficulty, and as he admits, are not always wholly representative. Being engaged in economic studies in Germany while the commission was at work there, I had frequent occasion to note both in the daily press and in conversation with our consuls the irritation with which the German manufacturers received the commission, an irritation embittered by the McKinley bill. Many firms, among the largest and most prosperous producers refused to furnish any information. It is probable that this was true in the coal industry also where statistics drawn from the west of Germany would have a wholly different color from those gathered in Silesia. Besides it is not clear that the information furnished was in all cases intended to state the whole truth. In Germany, especially, there are many ways in which small money wages are eked out by rights and privileges that almost defy tabulation.

As to the budget of receipts and expenses obtained from workmen, they cannot be received wholly without question. This lies in the nature of the case. There is more risk than Mr. Gould seems to suppose, in drawing conclusions from a very limited number of cases, and his results differ not immaterially from those of German investigators. In this case eighteen German and ten Belgian families must typify the average standard of living in the bituminous coal industry; but in Germany, at least, there is no one standard; the various districts differ widely from one another, and surely this

must be true also as between Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Alabama. Again, the families who lend themselves to such examination are hardly likely to be representative. We should imagine, at least, that those who kept detailed accounts would be more economical than others, while those who were anxious to publish their budgets might have a socio-political interest in magnifying the hardships of their condition. I have had occasion to do some work of this kind in Munich. It was certainly the case there, and will have to be guarded against everywhere. But while disposed to distrust the representative character of these European statistics, one must recognize that they have been gathered with great care and are as satisfactory as any we are likely to obtain.

An examination of Mr. Gould's tables shows first of all an interesting difference in the size of the families in various countries. Large families are not usually the sign of a degenerating race, and, were the parents under-fed or of low vitality, we should expect the mortality among children to be sufficient to correct an improvident excess of births. Now we find that among the coal-miners, the German family proves the largest. It averages more than seven persons, while the Belgian numbers six, the English 5.4, the American 5.3. The same relation is found among iron workers. Is this because the German does not feel, or because he will not heed, the prudential check? I should incline to the former view, for in the less well-paid bar-iron industry the German family decreases. The iron men in America are much better paid than the miners, and their families also show a marked reduction. It seems, then, that prosperity checks population in America, while narrowed resources reduce the births, or perhaps the survivals, in Germany.

There is an interesting table in Mr. Gould's pamphlet which enables us to compare the size of the native American family with that of the immigrant and the foreigner engaged in these industries. He found 1294 American families averaged 4.8 persons, while 525 British families counted 5.1, and 796 British families who had emigrated to the United States

had increased their average size to 5.4. Not so the French and German immigrating families which were smaller than those at home, especially the German, which decreased from 6.3 to five persons. All effort to explain these figures must be mere conjecture. It may be that the American families represent briefer marriages, or perhaps the more radical change in the social condition of French and German immigrants has interfered with the birth rate. It is curious to note however that the continental people tend to assimilate themselves in this regard to the American standard more rapidly than our British kin.

The government gathered information also as to the houses of the workmen, and found, as might be expected, that while about seventy per cent. of American workmen owned their houses, but four in each hundred Europeans were so fortunate. But this is not necessarily a hardship. Ownership brings ties and burdens, and the rents exacted in Europe are often less than the investment would warrant; for instance, at Essen. The American home, though for a smaller family, was found to contain a slightly smaller average of rooms (3.9) than the British or French, (4) but more than the Belgian (3.6), and much more than the German (2.6), whose family was largest of all. We miss any reference to the size of the rooms, which is probably larger in Germany than in France or Belgium, and perhaps than in this country. At least this view might find some color in the fact that the German families who come here require more rooms than the native Americans, while the French, and "other nationalities" get on with slightly less than we, or than their countrymen at home. The British like the Germans demand more room than we, so that the best class of foreign labor among us is found to make larger demands and to have a higher standard of comfort than the natives, a revelation that is startling, if true.

Mr. Gould, in his pamphlet, expresses the pious wish that "the European laborer would flee the gin-cup, and with the resulting savings add two more rooms to his home, as he

could then do." This it will be noticed would mean an increase of one half in the lodging accommodation, the locking up of a vast amount of capital, and a greater distance of the lodging from the scene of labor. But aside from these practical considerations, the "gin-cup" is usually filled with beer, from which both English and German workmen get much innocent pleasure, more probably than they would do from two additional rooms, or from twenty. The police, at least in Germany, prevent any unsanitary overcrowding. It is in connection with the "gin-cup" in the form of beer-mug and *Kaffee-Kanne* that the German workman and his family get the recreation that all need "to reconcile man to his lot." It is indeed one of the pleasantest phases of the life of the German laborer that he can afford, and cares to afford, the recreation for himself and his family that the suburban beer gardens offer. I do not know where, unless it be in some of our Germanized cities, one can find in this country as pleasant a picture of recreating laborers with their busily knitting wives and troops of children as may be seen of a Sunday afternoon at Berlin, in the woods or by the river in scores of gardens built for their especial use and enjoyment. It is after all but a small part of his income that he can dispose of freely as we shall soon see.

What do miners and iron workers earn, and how do they spend it? The annual earnings of the American bituminous coal miner are here stated to average \$426.73. The "other income" of the average family, that is, the earnings of the wife and children were found to be \$123.57, so that the average total income was \$550.30. The husband's earnings were considerably larger than the English miner's, (\$376.72) and much above the Belgian's and German's, (\$291.90 and \$257.51). But the "other income" of the Belgian and German was larger (\$135.05 and \$133.98) while the English family contributed but slightly less (\$118.53) so that the total earnings did not represent a very material difference when one considers the various advantages that the German enjoys, and in a less degree the Belgian and the Englishman, such

as sick and accident insurance, old age and disability pensions, and the greater cheapness of most articles of domestic use. The articles of domestic consumption, especially coarse foods, are indeed somewhat higher there than here, but a part of the difference is made up by greater economy. The wastefulness of the American laborer's household in this regard is in obvious and painful contrast to the parsimonious care of continental housekeeping.

The chief point that attracts comment here is that the typical continental family is not and cannot be supported by the unaided labor of its head. Even in America this was not the case with the majority of families examined, though the contribution of wife and children was much less, and their hours of labor no doubt less exacting. The Social Reformers, Dr. Gould among them, urge us to regard the ideal state as that in which the husband's labor suffices for the rest of the family which is to devote itself, it seems, to domestic happiness and intellectual improvement and ethical culture. But as a matter of experience are not family ties strongest where the community of labor and interest is greatest? Is it not well that the children of laborers shall be brought up to labor, and that the wife shall be more than the steward of her husband's earnings? Will not this inculcate mutual respect and healthy independence? Habits of industry acquired in youth, are likely to prove more valuable than the advanced school to the children of the miner and iron worker, and the business coöperation between husband and wife, as we see it especially in France, gives added strength to the family bond. This was indeed one of the chief advantages of the vanishing "house industry" whose memory is still cherished in Chemnitz and Lyons.

It cannot be said that the physique of the children suffers, for Mr. Gould finds that the naturalized European is preferred for offices of strength in our machine shops. "It is a fact of common experience in the United States," he says, "that in a machine shop, for example, three-fourths of the fitters will be foreign born, while among the machinists sev-

enty-five per cent. will be native Americans." These physically superior men had been productive at an age when American boys are kept from work, and they were the children of mothers who had a similar youth. The size of their families bear witness to strong vitality. Besides, the workman's wife who works least, will spend most, and so he will then need larger wages for his sole labor than sufficed to pay the labor of all. The millenium will require a very elastic wages-fund.

The figures for bar-iron workers in Mr. Gould's tables, seem to vary inexplicably from those we have been considering. The American miner earned \$426 a year. The iron worker could get \$698. On the other hand the German iron worker is credited with but \$244, while the miner earned \$257, so that a branch worse paid in Germany commanded sixty-three per cent. more wages in America, while in Belgium it got thirty per cent. less. Certainly these figures suggest that the conditions and character of the labor in this branch must vary too largely to make comparison between countries profitable. That we have to do with peculiar conditions appears also when we examine the "other income" of these families. The German miner's wife and children could earn \$133; the iron worker's contributed only \$38. It cannot be that the work was unsuited to them, for the Belgian's wife and children added \$145 to his income, though his own earnings were less than the German's. Such figures demand an explanation, that they do not find in Dr. Gould's pamphlet. If the figures were got in Silesia, it is probable that the "other income" of the family took the form of liberty to cultivate, or other rights that eluded the tabulator.

Let us return to the coal miners and see what distribution they made of their earnings. Five per cent. of the income went for rent in Belgium, while twice this proportion was needed in Germany and 11.7 per cent. in the United States. The proportional expense for clothing was largest in America, being more than one-fifth of the earnings. Germans spent for clothes 17.8 per cent. of their income, exceeding the Bel-

gians absolutely, and the British proportionally. The charge for books and newspapers was about one per cent. except in Belgium where it fell to 0.4. For alcoholic drinks, both British and Belgians paid actually and proportionally more than Americans (8.5, 7.3, and 5.2 per cent.). The Germans spent least (4.1 per cent.) and probably most wisely. In tobacco, England has a long lead, owing to high tariff. America follows, then Belgium. The German workman expends but one per cent. of his family income on this consoling luxury, but he gets more for his money than any of them.

These statistics are responsible for the statement that the typical Belgian miner saves 12.9 per cent. of his income, the Englishman 7.7 per cent., the German 5.6 per cent., the American 4.6 per cent., a showing which Dr. Gould considers a matter of patriotic congratulation. It may be noted that the German, being partly secured by insurance, has less motive to save; the American apparently has less inclination.

It has seemed better to note the proportion of earnings devoted to each object, than the actual amount, which in some cases would be deceptive. Take, for instance, books and newspapers, the German miner will get as much for his \$2.77 as the Englishman for \$4.07, or the American for \$5.30. This method, too, brings out in stronger relief the weak point in the continental situation. The Belgian laborer must pay nearly 59 per cent. of his family income for food, the Englishman nearly 54, the German more than 52 per cent., while the American pays but 45 per cent. for what is certainly a more bountiful supply, though often less intelligently used. This increased cost of food is due in but very slight degree to legislation, and seems to be one of the unavoidable conditions of industry in those countries. It is a pity that we should not hasten to take advantage of the superiority that this would tend to give us under free competition for neutral trade.

If now we compare the expenses of the miners with those of the iron workers, we find the same variations whose puzzling character we have already noticed. The typical Ger-

man bar-iron worker ends his year with a deficit of some \$8, while the French and Americans in this branch are able to save some 14 per cent. of their incomes. The budget of the German steel worker also culminates in a deficit, while the Englishman manages to save nearly ten per cent. of his earnings. In these two branches, then, our statistics exhibit the average German as a chronic pauper. The German puddler, too, can save but one per cent., while his French neighbor has a surplus of 14 per cent. with equal protection, and the Englishman a surplus of 10 per cent. with free trade. The American miners save least of all; our iron workers can lay aside from 14 to 19 per cent. of their income. These great inequalities cannot be explained without more information than we have. Meantime we shall do well to treat them with respectful caution.

It will not do to say that the German is a less efficient workman than his neighbors or than the native American. Mr. Gould has disposed of that theory very effectively in a curious table that shows the earnings of foreign immigrants as compared with our native laborers. The average earnings of husbands of American birth are here stated at \$520.43, while the Englishmen who come to this country average \$556.74, and the Germans \$569.57. Further, the annual surplus of our immigrant laborers in these industries is stated to be for every race larger than that of the natives who, it would seem, offer an excellent object for charitable protection from the more efficient "pauper labor" of European immigrants. Indeed, the commission found that the British miner could earn more at home (\$402) than the native American in the United States (\$381), to say nothing of the legal advantages in regard to organization, hours, and payments.

It is an interesting observation that while at home the economic rank of British nationalities is Scotch, English, Welsh, and Irish, the order changes here to Scotch, Irish, Welsh, English. It is curious, too, to note that the expenditure of all these immigrants in their new home is less both for reading and for liquor, which in view of the newspapers

they are likely to read and the liquor they are likely to get, is probably a double gain. But when Dr. Gould notes that no nationality improves so much by immigration as the German, this conclusion is chiefly due to those suspicious figures for the iron industry. The German miner would probably find the competitors he left behind more grateful to him than the family he took with him to America. He might, perhaps, have a larger sum available for relaxation and enjoyment, but he would find that it would procure less of it for himself and far less for his family than at home where healthy recreation is more generally cultivated, and prized than by the same class here. He would find, too, that work in America was more exacting and more intense, that the cost of labor per unit of production differed much less than that per unit of time; in other words, that he was expected to work harder here than there.

Mr. Gould gives no figures for coal, but those for steel rails will serve the purpose. To roll a ton of rails costs for the labor in America \$1.54 in the one establishment that condescended to answer the commissioners. Here the average daily wage was \$2.06. The average daily wage was sufficient to pay for rolling one and one-third tons of rails. On the continent the labor cost \$1.04; the average earnings were \$1.08. The daily wage paid for only one ton. The workman seemed to get twice as much, but for the work that he did, his *opus operatum* as the theologians might say, he got only half again as much. Mr. J. Schoenhof has shown in *The Evening Post* of New York and elsewhere, that much the same conditions prevail in other, especially the textile, industries. The highest wages may not be absolutely the cheapest, but they are less costly than at first appears. Probably, reckoning wages in purchasing power, the European gets very nearly as much per ton of rails as the American, except in the highest grades of labor, and that quite without regard to tariff conditions which of course affect wages only indirectly and relatively to the enhanced cost of living.

The interest of Mr. Gould's document is greater than, one

fears, its usefulness is likely to be. It confirms what economists have known, or assumed with growing certainty. At some points the student of immigration is able to go further than it would have been safe to venture without this statistical support. Its greatest usefulness might be to check reckless assertions regarding European workmen, but this is probably too much to hope from those to whom truth is of less importance than votes. It is clear, indeed it has never been denied, that Germany and Belgium produce in these industries more cheaply than we do, but it is clear, too, that the difference is not as great as has been generally stated, not great enough to entice the best class of laborers thence to us. The complaint of students of immigration is that we are getting an inferior class of immigrants. The reason, as this study shows, is because our advantage is no longer great enough to attract that better class of laborers who are never long unemployed, and who are contented at home.

B. W. WELLS.